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Near East and
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Articles

Iran-Iraq: Dim Light at the End
of the Tunnel

Iraq has encouraged several diplomatic initiatives to negotiate an end to its six-year-old war with Iran. Baghdad has focused its efforts on members of the UN Security Council and Iraq's Middle Eastern allies and has pressed them to work for a comprehensive peace settlement. Iraqi officials have recently visited France, Italy, Japan, China, and the Soviet Union to bolster support for a cease-fire and sanctions against Iran. Turkey and Algeria have expressed interest in mediating the war, but the likelihood that either will succeed depends on Iran's willingness to drop its preconditions for negotiations. As long as Tehran continues to call for the ouster of Iraq's President Saddam Husayn as a precondition for peace talks, it is unlikely that any negotiations will develop.

UN Efforts

The UN Security Council has attempted to bring the two parties to the negotiating table since the beginning of the war, but Iranian intransigence has impeded all its efforts. Since 1985, UN Secretary General Perez de Cuellar has tried to negotiate a peace settlement between Iran and Iraq but with little success. In March 1985 he presented both sides with a proposal that would reduce the scope and intensity of the war but not create a cease-fire. Iran was willing to discuss the proposal because it did not impede its ability to carry on a ground war. Iraq, on the other hand, rejected the proposal because it did not call for a cease-fire, withdrawal to international boundaries, or negotiations leading to a comprehensive settlement of the war.

Iran's occupation of Al Faw in February 1986 prompted the Security Council to issue a renewed appeal for an end to the war. On 24 February it unanimously adopted Resolution 582 that called on

both sides to observe an immediate cease-fire, to withdraw to internationally recognized borders, and to immediately submit all aspects of the conflict to mediation or other means of peaceful settlement. Iran criticized the resolution because it failed to condemn Iraq as the aggressor.

Initial Iranian gains during its recent offensive near Al Basra seem to have heightened UN interest in ending the war. In January the five Security Council permanent members began to discuss adoption of a resolution ordering an immediate cease-fire. The members agreed that, to be effective, the Security Council would have to back up this demand with sanctions if either Iran or Iraq rejected the cease-fire order. As the threat to Al Basra subsided, the move for strong UN action stalled. To revive peace efforts Iraqi officials have visited several countries, including France, Italy, Japan, China, and the Soviet Union, to urge them to adopt a strong resolution to end the fighting and possibly initiate an arms embargo against Iran.

The Iraqis are seeking a comprehensive cease-fire, a withdrawal of forces monitored by international observers, an exchange of prisoners, and assurances of compliance by both sides. As in the past, Baghdad says that it will reject any settlement that resembles previous UN resolutions, which favored Iran by limiting the cease-fire to the Persian Gulf and called for a step-by-step settlement rather than an overall end to the war. Iraq may believe that the UN initiative has a good chance of passing because Security Council members are worried about Iranian advances near Al Basra. Although we doubt that the

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Conditions for Ending the War

Iraqi Conditions

Iraq has expressed a willingness to negotiate an end to the war since the early stages of the fighting. Originally, Iraq sought absolute guarantees concerning sovereignty over the Shatt Al Arab and over land that belonged to Iraq but Iran had seized. Baghdad based its claims on the agreements of 1913-14 that put the frontier on the eastern bank of the Shatt as opposed to the 1975 Algiers accord that fixed it at the deepwater channel. In July 1981 the Iraqi Foreign Minister said publicly that settlement of the conflict should be based on the following principles:

- The inadmissibility of using force in resolving disputes and the restoration of all rights taken by force from their legitimate owners.
- Mutual respect for sovereignty and noninterference in the internal affairs of other countries.
- Freedom of navigation in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz.

By April 1982 declining Iraqi military fortunes had led Baghdad to seek arbitration of the dispute, and in October 1984 the Iraqi Foreign Minister told the press that Iraq would accept international arbitration of all territorial questions, including the Shatt Al Arab dispute, according to the principles of international law.

In a message addressed to the Iraqi people on 14 June 1985 in connection with a temporary halt to the bombing of Iranian towns, Saddam Husayn listed the following conditions for ending the war:

- A comprehensive cease-fire on land, sea, and air.
- A pullback to international borders.

- A comprehensive exchange of prisoners of war.
- Direct negotiations based on mutual respect of each side's integrity and noninterference in each other's internal affairs.
- A correlation of these basic points so that the violation of one would be deemed a violation of them all.

Iranian Conditions

Iran's primary demand for ending the war has been the ouster of Saddam Husayn and the Ba'th government in Iraq. Iranian leaders have sometimes hinted that they would be satisfied with the removal of Saddam Husayn, but Tehran's official position continues to call for the removal of the Ba'thist regime. The principal Iranian demands in the early stages were unconditional Iraqi withdrawal and international condemnation of Iraqi aggression. By October 1981 Iran's demands were as follows:

- Iraqi withdrawal from Iranian territory.
- Identification and condemnation of the aggressor by a competent international tribunal.
- Implementation of the 1975 agreements.
- Payment of reparations by the aggressor.

Tehran eventually dropped the third condition, but in June 1982 another was added: the return of refugees to Iraq. By February 1983, when Iraq had withdrawn from most of the territory it occupied, the principle of Iraqi withdrawal became less important, and the most important conditions became the removal of the Ba'thist regime, reparations, and condemnation of the aggressor.

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United Nations will impose political or economic sanctions against Iran, Baghdad probably hopes that a strong resolution would help isolate Iran and possibly promote an effective arms embargo. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]
Washington's support for Iraq's proposals, particularly an arms embargo, is a critical test of US good will following disclosures of US arms sales to Iran. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Iraqi Foreign Minister Aziz called for President Reagan's active support for a renewed arms embargo against Iran. The Iraqis are pleased with the President's recent statement on the war in which he held Tehran responsible for continuing the fighting and called for a withdrawal to internationally recognized borders. The Iraqis, however, may be overestimating the US ability to persuade other Security Council members to support an effective arms embargo against Iran. [REDACTED]

The Soviet Stance

The Soviets have taken an active role in recent Security Council consultations on the war and have expressed a willingness to work for a cease-fire. [REDACTED] reiterated Moscow's interest in finding the quickest negotiated end to the war and reported that Soviet officials endorsed UN efforts to achieve a cease-fire. Soviet Foreign Minister Shevardnadze has noted the importance of the Iran-Iraq agreement not to attack civilian targets as a necessary step toward a cease-fire and stressed that continuation of the war provided a pretext for outside intervention in the Gulf. [REDACTED]

Moscow used the recent visits of the Iranian and Iraqi Foreign Ministers to project an image of peacemaker in the Gulf, to ensure that Soviet interests in the region are protected, and to capitalize on revelations of US arms sales to Iran. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the Soviets were careful to provide the same access to both Foreign Ministers to demonstrate their willingness to treat both countries equally. At the same time, Moscow used the visits to criticize Tehran's continued belligerency and to underscore Soviet support for Iraqi efforts to find a

peaceful settlement to the war. The Soviets are likely to continue to be active in UN deliberations and to maintain contact with both Baghdad and Tehran. By doing this, the Soviets can ensure their involvement in any developing UN negotiations and strengthen their credentials with the Arab world as a peacemaker in the region. [REDACTED]

Efforts by Other International Organizations

The Arab League and the Islamic Conference Organization also have tried to mediate the Iran-Iraq war but have been unsuccessful primarily because Iran suspects that both are fronts for Iraqi and moderate Arab interests. Following an emergency session of the League's Committee of Seven in Baghdad in early February, Arab League Secretary General Chedli Klibi met in Tunis with the ambassadors of the five permanent Security Council members to garner support for Iraqi and Arab efforts in the United Nations. The thrust of Klibi's message was that the League fully supported Iraqi efforts to secure a UN resolution condemning Iran and calling for a comprehensive peace settlement. [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the Arab League members hope this approach will force the United States and the USSR to actively participate in UN efforts to impose a settlement. [REDACTED]

The Islamic Conference Organization passed a resolution on the war during its summit meeting in Kuwait in January. The resolution called on Iran to accept UN Resolutions 582 and 588, as Iraq had done, and to declare its willingness to end the war peacefully. It thanked the Islamic Peace Committee for its efforts to bring about a settlement but failed to instruct the committee either to continue its work or to cease its existence. The summit meeting's final communique, however, called on the Islamic Conference Organization's secretary general to follow up on the resolutions adopted in Kuwait "by all possible means and in accordance with evolving circumstances." [REDACTED]

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Kuwait—deeply worried about the war just across its border—will try to breathe new life into an Islamic Conference effort that bypasses the moribund Islamic Peace Committee.

as Islamic Conference chairman for the next three years, would do what it could in conjunction with the Peace Committee and Islamic Conference Secretary General Pirzada. A direct role for Kuwait is difficult, given Iran's perception that Kuwait is firmly aligned with Iraq. Kuwait had contacted Iran during the summit meeting to ask for Tehran's cooperation with a scaled-down committee. Iran said it would cooperate only if it could approve the summit meeting's final communique and resolution concerning the war. Nevertheless, the summit meeting participants agreed that Kuwait, Pirzada, and the full Peace Committee should continue their efforts with Tehran despite its intransigence.

Pirzada recently returned from Moscow, where he met with Soviet officials to discuss Soviet-Islamic Conference Organization relations and possibilities for mediating an end to the war. The Soviets told Pirzada that, on the basis of their discussions with Iranian Foreign Minister Velayati, Iran was not interested in making peace with Iraq. Furthermore, the Soviets said they saw little hope that the United Nations could bring about an end to the fighting and that, in their view, the Islamic Conference had the best chance of ending the war, given its recent mandate to try to mediate a peace settlement.

Algerian Efforts

Algeria is one of the few Middle Eastern countries maintaining relations with Iran since the revolution, and it has offered to mediate since the early days of the war. Algeria's role in the 1975 Iran-Iraq agreements makes it well qualified to mediate, but, despite numerous contacts—many of them unpublicized—with both sides, Algeria has been no more successful than others in bringing the two countries to the negotiating table. In 1984-85 the Algerians were largely inactive because they perceived that the Iranians were unwilling to talk, and Algeria did not want to risk damaging its relations with Tehran. An Algerian attempt to revive mediation in February 1986 was rebuffed.

Algeria may be interested in renewing its efforts to end the conflict, but, given Iranian intransigence, the prospects for success are slim. Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz visited Algeria in January to press the Algerians to ascertain current Iranian thinking on the war. Aziz expressed concern that, in the face of Iran's recent military successes, support for Iraq among some of the Arab Gulf states might be wavering. The Iraqis also were concerned that Syria and Libya were preparing a resolution for presentation at the Islamic Conference summit meeting that would condemn Iraq without criticizing Iran. Aziz asked Algerian President Bendjedid to use his influence to blunt Syrian and Libyan efforts at the summit meeting.

Aziz's trip to Algiers in January broke no new ground on the subject of reviving Algeria's dormant efforts to mediate the war.

Turkey's Role Limited

Turkey repeatedly asserts its neutrality in the Iran-Iraq war while continually calling for a quick end and offering its services as a mediator. Ankara maintains good relations with Iran and Iraq, Turkey's two leading trade partners in the Middle East. Economic

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ties, coupled with a long standing policy of seeking accommodation with its hostile neighbors, restrict Turkey's political maneuverability and contribute to its unwillingness to risk confrontation. [REDACTED]

Other Arab states believe that Turkey can help mediate an end to the war, and at January's Islamic summit meeting in Kuwait they pressed Turkey to take a more active role. Iran, however, has repeatedly resisted Ankara's efforts, and relations recently have been strained by two Turkish attacks on Iranian-supplied Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq. [REDACTED]

Ankara faces a dilemma. It would like to see an early end to the war, but not at Iraq's expense. The Turks probably tilt toward Iraq because their economic stakes in Iraq are larger and because they are nervous about the repercussions of a clear Iranian victory. Wishing to remain on good terms with Iran, however, and to preserve its perceived role as a moderating force in the region, Ankara probably will continue to offer its services as a mediator. [REDACTED]

Prospects

Iraq probably will continue to press for a strong UN resolution calling for a comprehensive end to the fighting, but the likelihood of achieving a peace settlement, at least in the near future, is slim. Barring an Iranian defeat or the death of Khomeini, it is unlikely that Tehran will lessen its preconditions for negotiations, particularly its call for a change of regime in Baghdad. Tehran has linked the success of the revolution to its ability to topple the Ba'thist regime, and ending the war short of victory would call into question Iran's political credibility and claim of religious invincibility. [REDACTED]

Algeria, Turkey, and the Islamic Conference Organization will continue to explore the possibilities of bringing the two sides to the negotiating table, but their efforts are likely to be blunted by Iranian intransigence. If Iran's position changes, Algeria probably has a better chance of playing the role of mediator, given its successes in the past. [REDACTED]

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